

To the Honorable Edward J. Davila  
United States District Judge

The offense I committed has affected many lives and I am truly remorseful for the actions I took. The pain and hurt that I have caused and the loss of relationships and friendships with those who trusted me is unbearable at times. I am sorry to have caused this. I know that everyone faces different stresses in their lives and most people are able to find a way to deal with them. Unfortunately, I did not. I wish I had been strong enough to ask for help when I needed it most, but I wasn't.

What I did goes against everything I stand for, yet I chose to not follow my own ethics and morals, and I am so ashamed of this. I have always tried to teach my children the difference between right and wrong, to live their lives with good ethics and strong morals, however I have let everyone down, including myself, by my actions. I don't think I will ever be able to understand how I let myself make the decisions I made. I know that this will not be forgotten, but I will do my best to make amends, and to continue learning the lessons of this experience.

I promised myself at an early age that I would make sure my family always felt secure, never having to worry about not having a place to call home. I promised that my children would always have a mother and father who loved and protected them. I wanted to show Mark that with me he could have a good life filled with love and support also. I went to every performance, award ceremony, church outing and event that was important to my children, even if I had to fight the urge to not to go. It was very important to me that they stayed in the same school, were able to form lifelong friendships and have the stability that I wanted as a child. I hope that I was able to accomplish some good with my efforts, but I know now that my family would rather have struggled more and gone without than to see me like this, in a situation of my own making.

MBARI serves a wonderful role in the community, and I felt honored to be able to work for such a great organization. Because MBARI's mission is research, the accounting dept was on the low end of the totem pole, and its staff worked so hard trying to keep up with the growth of the MBARI's DMO and Science work force and the growth of the accounting workload. It was very stressful, and it became hard to not feel like my family and I deserved better. I wanted to quit on numerous occasions but I promised my supervisor that I would never leave her stranded. At some point, I broke from the pressure of trying to juggle my work load along with family and personal responsibilities and my physical and mental health. I acted on my feelings in a completely wrong way. Once I started down that path, I felt like I was caught in a circle, as if on a hamster wheel, and couldn't find the means of exiting. I was wrong to take money that wasn't rightfully mine and I'm extremely sorry for that.

My soul, body, mind, spirit and heart are broken. Even before I was discovered, what I was doing was taking a toll on me. I am relieved to not be living a lie any longer, but I miss the person I used to be and want to be better like I once was. I want my family and friends to be proud of me, not ashamed of me. I want to live my life without the anxiety and panic attacks I deal with daily, and I want to be at peace with my past and move forward with the support of my family. I know that because of what I did, I have work to do to make my way back. I sincerely apologize to the MBARI family for the effect my actions have had on them, both as individuals and as an institution.

I hope that through this you are able to see the Lisa who would never want to intentionally hurt her family, friends, coworkers or community. My misguided actions have destroyed the person I was and the example I tried so hard to set for my family. I hope to prove that I can grow from this experience, as terrible as it has been for all involved. I have faith that I can take the best of the person I was before and learn the lessons of what I did to bring myself here.

Thank you,  
Lisa McMahon